

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 L-03

PM-07 NSC-10 SS-15 AID-20 OMB-01 IGA-02 MMS-03 RSR-01

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R 292136Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9198

INFO SECDEF

SSCINCSO

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 7160

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OGEN

SUBJECT: STUDY OF POSSIBLE MOVE OF USSOUTHCOM FROM CANAL ZONE

REF: A) STATE 164406 B) CARACAS 7235

1. SUMMARY. LOCATION OF USSOUTHCOM IS NOT A MAJOR ISSUE IN COLOMBIA. MILITARY EFFECTS RESULTING FROM REMOVAL OF USSOUTHCOM HEADQUARTERS FROM PANAMA WOULD BE MARGINAL, ALTHOUGH SOME DISADVANTAGE WOULD RESULT FROM RELOCATION OF COMPONENT COMMAND FACILITIES. POLITICAL-DIPLOMATIC EFFECTS OF SOUTHCAM LOCATION ARE ALSO MINOR. RELOCATION, HOWEVER WOULD BENEFIT U.S. INTERESTS IN COLOMBIA BY REMOVING POTENTIAL IRRITANT TO US-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS AND BY DEMONSTRATING US RESOLVE TO DEVELOP MATURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH HEMISPHERE NATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE REMOVAL FROM PANAMA OF USSOUTHCOM WOULD HAVE NO APPRECIABLE POLITICAL EFFECT ON OUR RELATIONS WITH COLOMBIA. THE MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS IMPLICATIONS FOR COLOMBIA OF USSOUTHCOM'S LOCATION ARE ALSO MARGINAL. THE EFFECT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT GREATER IF THE COMPONENT COMMANDS INCLUDING THE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS OFFERING COURSES IN

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SPANISH NOW UNDER USSOUTHCOM WERE ALSO TO BE RELOCATED. AS FOR PUBLIC

OPINION ONLY A FEW COLOMBIANS OUTSIDE OF GOVERNMENT ARE AWARE OF USSOUTHCOM AND THE IMPRESSION THEY HAVE IS OF A US MILITARY PRESENCE BASED IN PANAMA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA ACTING AS RELUCTANT HOST.

3. IN REGARD TO MAP ADMINISTRATION AND DOD REPRESENTATION IN OFFICIAL VISITS THE RELOCATION OF SOUTHCOM WOULD HAVE NO ADVERSE EFFECTS. COLOMBIAN MILITARY OFFICIALS, IN COMMON WITH THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY (REF: B) NORMALLY PREFER TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH THEIR SERVICE COUNTERPARTS IN WASHINGTON. (THE SAME CONSIDERATIONS APPLY TO FMS SALES, WHICH ARE NOW HANDLED DIRECTLY WITH WASHINGTON AGENCIES.) ALTHOUGH ONE OF THE MISSIONS EXERCISED BY CINCSO IS THE COORDINATION OF US MILITARY EFFORTS IN LATIN AMERICA THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY CHIEFS ARE NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED WHERE THIS COORDINATION IS EXERCISED. THE MAINTENANCE OF EVACUATION AND DISASTER RELIEF PLANS IN THE CANAL ZONE DOES, BECAUSE OF PROXIMITY, HOLD SOME ADVANTAGE FOR COLOMBIA. THE PLANNING AND CONDUCTING OF JOINT AND COMBINED EXERCISES WOULD NOT BE GREATLY AFFECTED BY USSOUTHCOM'S RELOCATION. SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS WOULD BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THE RELOCATION OF THE AIR FORCE COMPONENT COMMAND AND OF S&R FACILITIES..

4. FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EFFECT FOR COLOMBIA OF A SOUTHCOM RELOCATION WOULD BE SOMEWHAT HIGHER TRAVEL COSTS IF USSOUTHCOM'S TRAINING FACILITIES WERE RELOCATED, AND LESS CONVENIENT COMMUNICATION THAN NOW EXISTS BETWEEN THE CANAL ZONE AND BOGOTA. THE RELOCATION OF SOME OF THE USSOUTHCOM COMPONENT COMMAND FACILITIES WOULD ALSO HAVE THE EFFECT OF REDUCING THE HABIT OF LOOKING TO CZ FACILITIES TO DEAL WITH LOCAL EMERGENCIES (I. E. DURING THE RECENT AVIANCA BUILDING FIRE, GOC OFFICIALS RAISED NUMEROUS QUESTIONS ABOUT FIRE-FIGHTING EQUIPMENT AVAILABILITY IN THE C.Z)

5. THERE IS, AMONG GOC OFFICIALS, A CERTAIN AMBIVALENCE TOWARD PANAMA CANAL TREATY ISSUES. GIVEN COLOMBIA'S DEPENDENCE ON THE CANAL, BOTH FOR INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCOASTAL COMMERCE, GOC OFFICIALS PRIVATELY VIEW THE US MILITARY PRESENCE AS A GUARANTEE OF RELIABLE CANAL OPERATIONS. THE GOC IS ALSO, OF COURSE, INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING ITS EXISTING TRANSIT RIGHTS. COLOMBIAN OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, ARE APT TO BE RESPONSIVE, IN PUBLIC, TO PANAMA'S

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COMPLAINTS OF EXPLOITATION BY THE US AND IN THE NAME OF LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY, SIDE WITH PANAMA, TO THE POSSIBLE DETRIEMENT OF THEIR OWN LONG-TERM INTERESTS. THE RELOCATION OF USSOUTHCOM MIGHT ACCORDINGLY, OBVIATE AN ISSUE THAT COULD IN THE FUTURE FORCE COLOMBIA INTO A STANCE INIMICAL TO LARGER COLOMBIAN AND US INTERESTS.

6. ON BALANCE THE DIPLOMATIC, POLITICAL AND MILITARY EFFECTS OF THE

RELOCATION OF USSOUTHCOM WOULD BE SLIGHT IN COLOMBIA. THE RELOCATION OF SOME OR ALL OF THE COMPONENT COMMAND FACILITIES WOULD LESSEN THE BENEFITS NOW ACCORDED THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY BY THE PROXIMITY IN THE CZ OF US PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND ADVICE. THIS DISADVANTAGE, HOWEVER, WOULD BE OFFSET PARTICULARLY IN THE CASE OF NON-CANAL -RELATED FUNCTIONS BY THE RMOVAL OR REDUCTION OF A POTENTIAL IRRITANT TO US RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA AND WOULD BE INDICATIVE OF LESS PATERNALISTIC MORE CONTEMPORARY US APPROACH TO HEMISPHERIC MATTERS.

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